

Empire Zone finally renewed

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ELIZABETHTOWN — After a year of fine-tuning, Essex County's Empire Zone has been renewed by the state.

The renewal means new businesses can be certified for tax breaks and other benefits that come with inclusion in the 1,280-acre zone.

For the last year, only pre-existing certified businesses got Empire Zone benefits, which are intended to create jobs and spur economic growth.

When the legislature rewrote the Empire Zone law last year, it created a detailed and lengthy process for re-establishing an existing zone, and Zone Coordinator Barbara Brassard and her colleagues worked all year long to follow it.

"The Governor's Commission has approved the Empire Zone Plan for Essex County, so we are now in business," she said.

"After Jan. 1, we will start the education process, especially for the zone areas that haven't had Empire Zone land before."

Supervisor Robert C. Dedrick (R-Ticonderoga) said Brassard worked hard on the mandatory restructuring of the local zone.

"You are to be congratulated that this thing finally came through. I know that you have been working very diligently."

Empire State Development Chairman Charles Gargano said the State Department of Economic Development will now begin to review applications for businesses seeking zone inclusion.

There are now seven sub-zones in Chesterfield, Moriah, North Hudson, Jay, Schroon, Ticonderoga and Wilmington.

The new law allowed only six non-contiguous subzones and one based on need, although existing sub-zones are grandfathered in as long as the businesses in them are still operating.

Brassard said she started the re-designation process last Jan. 1.

"It (a sub-zone) could previously be the footprint to a building; now it had to be divided up into zone areas."

The zone in Essex County had originally included only two square miles in Moriah and Port Henry but had been spun off over the years to include spot zones throughout the county, some as small as a single building.

Now there are just seven sub-zones. New zone boundaries and a zone development plan had to be approved separately for the Essex County zone.

"Our goal was to include downtown commercial areas and business parks where possible," Brassard said.

"The zone maps were approved two months ago. Since then, we've been working on fine-tuning our development plan."

From 1998 through 2003, the Essex County Empire Zone program resulted in 455 new jobs and \$34 million in capital investment, awarding \$2.4 million in tax credits and reductions.

About 90 businesses are certified now, but Brassard expects more to follow now that the zone has been renewed.

"I'm very happy that we can now move forward," she said. "Our goal in 2007 will be educate zone businesses about the new benefits that will be available if they qualify."

Zone incentives changed when the state rewrote the Empire Zone law.

"This is the state's program for businesses starting up or expanding," Brassard said. "They have to show they're making an investment in increasing employment."

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